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PRESS RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT CRITICISED FOR SILENCE ON EAST TIMOR

The Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), in a pamphlet published today, criticises Western governments for their silence about Indonesian atrocities in the former Portuguese territory of East Timor. Publication of the pamphlet coincides with a question to the Foreign Secretary tabled for today in the House of Lords by Lord Avebury. CIIR, the British Council of Churches and other organisations wrote to Lord Carrington before his departure for a visit to the ASEAN countries asking him to express to the Indonesian government British concern about the situation in East Timor.

Concern about the situation has been growing in Australia. The Australian Senate is to hold an enquiry into human rights in East Timor in March. Australian Catholic Relief has also appealed to Indonesia to allow Australian relief agencies to visit East Timor to produce a plan for the re-establishment of agriculture, which has been severely disrupted by Indonesian military operations.

Last November the leader of East Timor's Roman Catholics broke a six-year silence to denounce the killing by Indonesian forces of 500 East Timorese civilians at a local shrine known as the rock of St Anthony after a four-day siege. He also appealed for aid to avert famine. In June 1981 the Indonesian-controlled East Timor Regional People's Representative Assembly protested to Indonesia's President Suharto about the constant

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violence of the Indonesian forces in the territory, alleging murder, torture, rape and harrassment. The assembly also complained of widespread corruption and mismanagement on the part of the Indonesian administration and Indonesian firms in East Timor.

Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 and formally annexed it in 1976, actions which have been repeatedly condemned by the United Nations. 100 000 East Timorese are reliably reported to have died as a result of the Indonesian occupation, which has disrupted Timorese agriculture, leading to danger of renewed famine in 1982. Large-scale military campaigns are continuing. Nevertheless the Indonesian embassy in Canberra admitted recently that Timorese resistance is continuing and that some areas of East Timor remain out of Indonesian control.

The Indonesian authorities have done their best to isolate East Timor from the outside world. CIIR is publishing this Comment in an effort to draw attention to the flagrant denial of human rights and freedom to a people whose only crime, in the words of Mgr da Costa Lopes, is 'the desire to be independent of all oppression'.

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